DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 749 CS 504 761

AUTHOR Buzza, Bonnie W.
TITLE Oral Interpretation and Self-Disclosure: A Speculation.
PUB DATE 9 Apr 81
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Chicago, IL, April 9-11, 1981).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Interpersonal Relationship; Literature Appreciation; *Oral Interpretation; *Participation; *Self Disclosure (Individuals); *Self Expression; *Speech Communication; Speech Instruction; Student Role; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Audience Awareness

ABSTRACT

Effective oral interpretation, like effective communication, is self-revealing. Teachers and students of oral interpretation can improve analysis and performance of the literature by remaining aware of, first, their own involvement in the presentation and, second, the effect of this personal involvement on the audience. In the performance of oral interpretation, the author must first interpret and record his or her experience, then the oral interpreter must interpret and present the author's meaning, and finally the audience must interpret and respond to both the reader's performance and the author's original experience as expressed in the literature. Just as the giving of a name to a thing or idea reveals the namer, so does the effective interpretive performance of the reader reveal that individual. An effective interpreter, like an effective actor, often must look inward to seek common experience, or note its absence, in analyzing a selection. At any moment, but especially in a personal moment, interpreters must first deal with emotions in terms of their own experiences; then they must be willing to show their conclusions to others. In an oral interpretation performance, however, students may be unaware of the self-disclosure in their readings, and of this self-disclosure as a source of at least part of their discomfort. Nevertheless, the reality of self-disclosure must be faced for an interpretation to be successful. And, for a fully developed experience of oral interpretation, audiences must also become interpreters, thus engaging in the same imaginative involvement as the readers. (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED250749

ORAL INTERPRETATION AND SELF-DISCLOSURE:

A SPECULATION

A paper presented at the

Central States Speech Association
Chicago, Illinois
by

Bonnie W. Buzza
Associate Professor of Speech
and Director of the Readers Theatre
Ripon College
Ripon, Wisconsin 54971

April 9, 1981

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bonnie W. Buzza

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 504 761

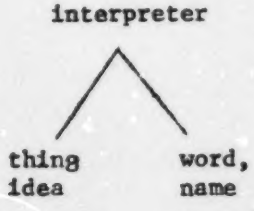
© 1981 by Bonnie W. Buzza

ORAL INTERPRETATION AND SELF-DISCLOSURE:

A SPECULATION

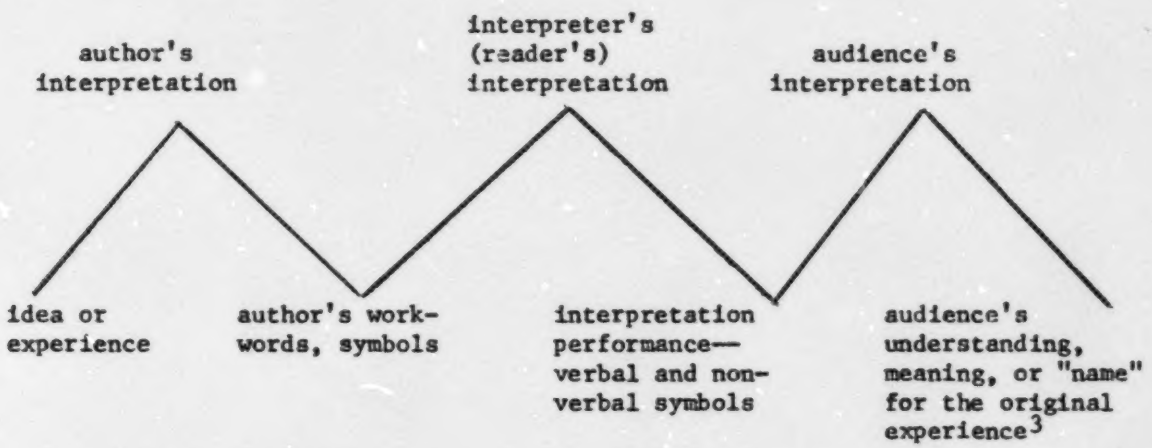
Effective oral interpretation, like effective communication, is self-revealing. Teachers and students of oral interpretation can improve analysis and performance of the literature by remaining aware of, first, their own involvement in the presentation and, second, the effect of this personal involvement on the audience. This paper presents a model for conceptualizing personal involvement and self-disclosure in oral interpretation, followed by a discussion of this involvement. Oral interpretation, as a performing art, is defined by Bacon as "the actualization or realization of literature through its embodiment in the performer."[1] The act involves the performer, the author through his or her literature, and the audience—three human elements. Human communication theory per se can thus make a significant contribution to the understanding of the oral interpretation of literature.

In The Meaning of Meaning Ogden and Richards provide a referential model of meaning, drawing attention to the role of the "interpreter" as the link between a thing, idea, or experience and the name or symbol which is applied to it. In their two-sided triangle[2] there is no connection between a referent (thing, idea, or experience) and the word or name given to it except as these words or ideas pass through the concept or interpretation system of the individual. It is only as the experience is interpreted or categorized by the individual that it acquires a name and a meaning.



A model of an oral interpretation performance involves three of these

triangles: first the author must interpret and record his or her experience, then the oral interpreter must interpret and present the author's meaning, and finally the audience must interpret and respond to the reader's performance and through this medium the author's original experience as expressed in the literature.



Just as the giving of a name to a thing or idea reveals the namer, so does the effective interpretation performance of the reader reveal that individual. For example, in conversation a child might request "an all by myself knife to cut my meat" thus revealing past experience. A classic example involves the description of a cat as a "hairy" rather than a "furry" animal, revealing an attitude, and probably past experience as well.

In a similar manner an author sorts out or interprets his or her experience and presents the finished work. The oral interpreter views that work, and it is the reader's interpretation of that work which is presented to the audience, not the work itself. The reader intermingles his or her experience and values with the literature in the performance. As any communicator responds to an input or stimulus, and by organizing, categorizing, and symbolizing makes and reflects the meaning of the input, so the interpreter responds to the piece of literature. The stimulus is in written form, more permanent than oral, and thus can be examined more easily over time, but the overall interpretation still

reflects the particular interpreter. The author's work comes to the audience one step up the abstraction ladder, enriched, explained, distorted, or diminished by the reader's interpretation of the work.

An effective interpreter, line an effective actor, often must look inward to seek common experience, or note its absence, in analyzing a selection. The actor, while maintaining control, will nevertheless seek to reflect the character rather than the self--will "become" the character rather than suggesting characterization as the interpreter will do.[4] The suggested character, however, is overtly self-revealing. As the reader suggests age, for example, he or she must first encounter the idea, and age in terms of one's own body. The reader then goes on to externalize the age factor, but does not, in a sense, "hide" the self or lose it in a fully developed character; rather the reader exposes him- or herself in the suggestion of the age.

The same exposure would be present in the instance of an emotional experience, for example "love." Discussing, analyzing a "love poem" and its meaning fully, then presenting one's understanding before an audience, reveals one's experiences, conclusions, and values just as an act of self-disclosure shrinks the mask or facade in the Johari window.[5]

This self-disclosure may be a strong factor in an actor's developing a character using the "Method" method. An ensemble feeling, time, trust, and a sensitive director all contribute to the actor's "freeing" him- or herself creatively to feel and to be. In this same manner a sensitive trainer encourages members of the group to open themselves to themselves in an interpersonal laboratory. The actor in his or her final performance does reveal the self, but it is covert and through the character. The communicator and especially the interpreter reveal themselves overtly and stand publicly beside their interpretations.

The preoccupation of students with the question of "the difference between

oral interpretation and acting" may well be a veiled question relating to fears of self-disclosure. Exploring experiences and feelings in the formal oral interpretation class or performance may be highly threatening to some students, more threatening than previously assumed. The use of the imagination in representing the characters and action of the selection can be more involving than explicitly performing or seeing a scene, just as radio can be more involving than television or film.[6] As one supplies imaginative details, one's fears and one's fantasies are given the chance for expression. "Theatre of the Mind" is well named, and individuals reluctant to consider their minds' contributions-may be uncomfortable in this field of interpreter's theatre. Others enjoy their own contributions, as readers and audience, to the experience.

Bent, a play by Martin Sherman, is an oral interpretation presentation which is currently being performed by at least one college student in the Midwest. Bent deals sympathetically, indeed empathically, with the lives of several homosexuals. No oral interpreter can effectively and sensitively perform the literature without revealing a personal attitude on the subject. No oral interpreter can effectively and sensitively perform the literature without serious analysis of both the self and the literature in the preparation of the performance. No audience can respond to, and obtain a meaning from, the literature as performed without responding to the young performer's response as well. The impact is heightened by the absence of the theatrical medium with its confinement of ideas and activity into a designated "pictoral space." The non-representational elements of the interpretation medium change the environment and the demands of the experience for all involved.[7]

The "personal risk" to that young man, by his self-disclosure—whatever his affection preference—is great, because he stands, as only himself, publicly, beside his interpretation. The "reward" to the young man, and the audience, is equally great. His sensitive reading enhances the author's writing; his

personal interpretation adds a dimension to the literature which is not there on the printed page.

At any moment, but especially in a personal moment, interpreters must first deal with emotions in terms of their own experience, then they must be willing to show their conclusions to others. Consider interpretation performances revealing Frankie's frustration in Carson McCuller's A Member of the Wedding, the pain of James Wright in his works such as "Mutterings Over the Crib of a Deaf Child," the self-questioning in Stephan Crane's Red Badge of Courage. Such self-disclosure students may well term "acting"--the revealing of emotion, belief, or experience, the revealing of the self. To them "just reading" may seem somehow safer, especially if individuals see themselves as "just reading" the words and ideas of others. In an oral interpretation performance, however, students may be unaware of the self-disclosure in their readings, and of this self-disclosure as a source of at least part of their discomfort or "stage fright."

Those working with students in oral interpretation notice that students with experience in acting are not necessarily the best interpreters. Some are excellent--but others don't respond with particular sensitivity to the art form and remain lost in the words and the trappings of the characters. The folklore of theatre says that many actors are shy people who reveal themselves only through the guise of another person, the character being portrayed. If there's a grain of truth to the myths, a suggestion as to the difficulty these actors have in feeling comfortable as interpreters could be partially obtained. Also some non-actors move easily into the interpreters' role, others have difficulty. With or without stage experience there may be a lack of ease in the performing that is not fully explained by the amount of practice or analysis given to the piece. There is a holding back of the self from both literature and audience. Johari's

mask/facade is tightly in place, and the oral interpretation performance suffers.

In any act of communication, the result is a learning about the participants in the communication as much as the event under consideration.[8] Individuals communicate about what they know, see, and feel. They respond selectively to a world they construct themselves, selectively, from the overload of information/inputs available to them. As they share meanings for the contents of the communication, they learn about the content--but the real learning is about the experiences and judgments of the participants themselves concerning the content of that communication.[9] Concerning oral interpretation Kleinau and McHughes introduce this idea in their opening pages of Theatres for Literature when they note:

> The building of a relationship with a literary selection is interpersonal; it begins with a series of discoveries about the distinguishing qualities, the strengths, and the conflicts within the world of the literature and within our own worlds. One of the excitements of transforming a literary work is the discovery of its living presence, which allows us to come to terms with another consciousness: that of the speaker in the literature. As we interact with the literary world, two very important things happen: we shape the literature through our interpretation of it, and the literature shapes us by stretching our experience. Such is the interpersonal dynamic of creating a text (our personal vision) of a work.[10]

Application of interpersonal communication theory can help the interperter to understand and to utilize these elements in preparing and presenting the selection. The reality of self-disclosure must be faced for an interpretation to be entirely successful. Answers must be found for "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am"?[11] The values of self-disclosure should be noted, along with the risks...and those using oral interpretation with reticent students may find this concept of assistance in helping understand formal and informal performance anxieties. Bacon summarizes this position:

> The act of oral reading before an audience (though that audience may be a single listener or, indeed, the reader alone) is a way of making objective, of testing the accuracy of the interpreter's measure of the poem. Listening to a student's reading of a poem, the audience

> knows--often more clearly than by questioning him or her about it--what the poem means to the reader.[12]

For a fully developed experience of oral interpretation, audiences must also become interpreters and must engage in the same imaginative internal involvement as the readers, must participate in the theatre of the mind, for the effective communication of the author's ideas. This paper has focused on the second of the three triangles in the oral interpretation model. Audiences respond to the performance, however, and similarly reveal themselves and their experience in their reactions. They attach meaning to the performances by their own interpretations of those performances, and they reveal those meanings by descriptive and evaluative labels for the literature and the performance. In doing this, audiences complete the communication transaction, and open the possibility for further speculation on relationships between oral interpretation and self-disclosure.

ENDNOTES

[1]Bacon, Wallace A., The Art of Interpretation, third edition, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979, p. 6.

[2]Ogden, C. K., and Richards, I.A., The Meaning of Meaning, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1946, p. 11.

[3]Buzza, Bonnie Wilson, "Oral Interpretation in a World of Words," Journal of the Wisconsin Communication Association, Volume XI, number 1, Fall-Winter, 1980, p. 15.

[4]Lee, Charlotte, I., and Gelati, Frank, Oral Interpretation, fifth edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977, p. 303.

[5]For further discussion of the Johari Window see Luft, Joseph, Group Processes, Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1970, p. 15.

[6]Schwartz, Tony, The Responsive Chord, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974.

[7]See Kleinau, Marion L. and McHughes, Janet Larsen, Theatres for Literature, Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 5-10.

[8]Buzza, Bonnie Wilson, "Correspondence Theory," unpublished paper, 1968.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Kleinau and McHughes, op. cit., p. 4.

[11]Powell, John, Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?, Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1969.

[12]Bacon, op. cit., p. 10.